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THE SENSE OF THE SYMPOSIUM

ON RANGELAND POLICIES FOR THE FUTURE

A Report To

the
Assistant Secretary of Agriculture
For Conservation, Research, and Education
U. S. Department of Agriculture,

the
Assistant Secretary of the Interior
for Land and Water Resources
U. S. Department of the Interior,

and the

President's Council on Environmental Quality

by the
Interagency Ad-Hoc Committee on
The Sense of the Symposium

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RANGELAND POLICIES FOR THE FUTURE

INTRODUCTION

This is the report of an ad-hoc committee assigned to determine the sense of the Symposium on Rangeland Policies for the Future (Tucson, Arizona, January 28-31, 1979). The report is addressed to the Assistant Secretaries of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of the Interior, who, through their parent Departments together with the President's Council on Environmental Quality, sponsored the Symposium.

The report presents issues opened at the Symposium by its 320 participants. Options for resolution of concerns or for realizing opportunities for range development were outside the scope of the ad-hoc committee's assignment, and, thus, are not included.

The ad-hoc committee reviewed each prepared paper as well as transcripts of all discussion sessions, and statements and questions submitted by participants. From the review, principal areas of concern were developed. These areas of concern and conclusions drawn from them comprise the body of the report.

The ad-hoc committee was made up of representatives from the Bureau of Land Management (Keith Miller), Fish and Wildlife Service (Robert Smith), Soil Conservation Service (Don Pendleton), Science and Education Administration-Extension (Dixon Hubbard), Science and Education Administration-Agriculture Research (Robert Barnes) and Forest Service (Robert S. Rummell, Chairman).

SUMMARY

Approximately 320 participants contributed productively and with enthusiasm to successful completion of the Symposium on Rangeland Policies for the Future, Tucson, Arizona, January 28-31, 1979.

The Sense of the Symposium is that rangelands of the U.S.A. are an important national resource of considerable and long-time importance. They are generally well-managed and in better condition than in the past, but still contain sizeable acreages of poor condition rangeland. With better management and improvement, this more than 800 million-acre resource can contribute more effectively to the national good. If all concerned interests work together in a cooperative manner, range can become a full partner in natural resource management.

Technology is available for much of the job of improving conditions and applying sound rangeland management, yet the administrative and management process often constrains the job. Affecting the goal of achieving a national rangeland base in satisfactory condition with a community of economically-viable livestock producers, has been the attitude that rangeland is a step-child of natural resources and agricultural production. Insufficient funds for rangeland programs and not enough highly-qualified personnel also have limited progress. In addition, the economic problems of a cost-price squeeze directly affect the economic stability of the livestock producer and his ability to invest in range improvement.

Accelerated application of existing range technology should increase the rate at which rangelands become fully productive for all goods and services. Intensification of research on improving rangeland for forage production, per se, and on inventory techniques should complement existing range research programs.

AREAS OF CONCERN

Issues surfaced during the Symposium have been aggregated under five basic areas of concern. These are presented in the sections that follow.

STEWARDSHIP

It was into this setting that the Symposium on Rangeland Policies for the Future fit.

America's 800 plus million acres of rangelands have been an integral part of its growth. Livestock use of rangelands generally preceded settlement. Often, this use occurred in the absence of knowledge about inherent limits on rangeland productivity and how to graze the range while maintaining the vegetation, soil, water, and other resources. As a result, on poorly managed rangelands, and generally before 1900, vegetation was weakened or destroyed, soils were damaged and erosion began. Water values suffered; wildlife were adversely impacted; other resources, including forest trees were damaged.

Much has been done to eliminate the kinds of management that impaired rangeland productivity; much has been done to restore rangelands to satisfactory condition. Many rangelands have been successfully seeded with grasses and other plants; better management has let native vegetation re-cover the soil on many deteriorated sites. However, as the Symposium pointed out, much yet remains to be done if this, the largest single kind of land in the USA, is to contribute fully and fittingly to America's future.

Concerns over the impact of brush invasion upon range productivity and the knowledge that much brush control technology exists, were balanced against concerns that herbicides used for controlling brush may be adverse to human health. Concerns that more livestock should be produced from rangelands were countered with concerns that non-livestock uses of rangeland must be fully and carefully considered in developing plans for allocation of vegetation to various uses in the management of rangeland. Discussion of these and other issues was both enthusiastic and conducted with general optimism that they could be resolved.

ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

Laws, regulations, and management (those who manage and the processes they employ) were alleged to be root causes of many range problems. The relatively high incidence of such allegations suggests strongly that the administrators of range programs should carefully

examine their management and administrative bases and processes in seeking answers to the cause of many range problems.

Opinions were expressed that a proliferation of uncoordinated laws has led to promulgation of regulations that get in the way of sound and expeditious range management. These were not Federal administrators expressing such concerns, but recipients of Federal services and educators as observers of the administrative process. Activities alleged to get in the way of effective land resource management included OSHA reports and environmental impact statements. But, conversely, as with many issues, the merits of the environmental impact statement process also were defended.

The Symposium suggested a need for greater involvement of the public in the decisionmaking process. If public understanding of the Federal agency role is to be attained, and if the public's voice is to be heard, the Federal administrator must design better ways for the public to participate.

Although but briefly discussed, it appeared that State Governments need to be given greater opportunity for and to accept higher levels of involvement in public (i.e., Federal) land management questions--again, an issue of participation and involvement of non-Federal persons in Federal decisionmaking.

Need for greater coordination among Federal, State, and private organizations and individuals in range resource management was a conclusion from analysis of the Symposium's papers and discussions. This need for coordination extends from planning through management of lands of intermingled ownership.

Tight money supplies and high interest rates for financing range development programs, and the inherently slow rates at which range investments begin to show return, were alleged to prevent application of technology for solving rangeland problems. In addition to limiting public land range development and improvement, curtailed budgets have adversely affected the ability of public agencies to fully implement programs of technical assistance, cooperation, and coordination of resource planning and education on private rangeland. Funding constraints also have limited range research.

The supply of range-trained personnel has been limited by both dollars available for range programs and agency personnel ceilings. The Symposium surfaced a concern often expressed in recent years by the academic community, the Society for Range Management, and some range users, that personnel who handle technical range matters for the Federal agencies should be better qualified. To proponents of this position, this means that the qualification standards for the OPM Range Conservation series should require 18 or more semester hours of range management courses compared to the existing requirement of 12 hours, and that tenure in positions should be increased

to assure that the incumbent has time to become thoroughly acquainted with his position, its responsiblities, and the area and his constituency.

Some problems such as big game or predator control appear to have aspects closely associated with management's responsibilities. With technology at hand for control of big game in many situations, resolution of conflicts in range use between big game and livestock may rest in objective and politically-free managerial discussion, judgment, and decision. Control of predators, although not of major concern at the Symposium, nevertheless was an issue whose resolution lies more in the administrative arena than in technology.

A sensitive area to some participants was the use of and effects of herbicides, especially 2,4,5-T, in control of brushy species of vegetation. On the other hand, loss of an apparently safe, cost-effective tool for brush management was considered adverse to sound range management.

Meeting the demand for range forage was directly confronted in only a few instances. Its importance, however, is implicit in the general concern expressed over less than desirable condition and the resultant lowered range productivity, competition for forage between livestock and big game, and concern over emerging and competing uses of rangeland such as off-road-vehicular travel. Meeting demand for range in an effective manner was an implied issue as it interrelates with the Symposium's concern over shortfalls of funds for range programs.

The role of public lands in meeting forage, food, and fiber needs was discussed. There were those who believed the dominant role of public rangelands should be to provide livestock forage to help meet national needs for food. However, the majority appeared to favor accommodation of the legally-based mission of the public lands administrator to provide for meeting broad natural resource needs, while grazing the range with livestock and providing for wildlife, including fisheries.

Discussions should have helped clarify the respective and differing agency responsibilities to Federal and non-Federal lands. Some suggested that private individuals could do a better job than the Federal Government in managing the Federal range and may yet not accept that the Federal land-administering agency must administer the Federal lands as the law directs and cannot delegate that responsibility to the non-Federal sector. Others seemed not to fully recognize that the law directs a multi-resource role for Federal lands, while the private landowner can maximize use of rangeland for livestock production alone if he so chooses.

While coordinated resource planning in areas of intermingled Federal, State, and private lands appeared acceptable, it remained clear that

the function of land use planning should be reserved for use on Federal lands; direction for planning use of State and non-Federal lands must remain with those landowners and managers.

TECHNICAL MATTERS

The Symposium reflected changing public attitudes that all resources of the range be made fully available for society's benefit. Not only must the range manager produce forage for livestock; he must also produce food and habitat for wildlife, scenery for the esthete, water for the water-dependent, and a stable environment for the at-a-distance urban citizen who wants rangelands well-maintained simply because they are part of his national heritage.

If the range manager is to meet these needs, he must have good data from which to develop good plans, which in turn relate to individual and societal goals.

The Symposium very well covered the issue of range data availability and quality. It admitted that not all of the range data base is solid; much is weak, with improvement needed in how data are collected, the kinds of data to collect, and how to handle data. Questioned were some of the concepts basic to determination of range conditions. Legislative requirements for current and continuing inventory and identification of public rangelands conditions and trends were used to illustrate the need to step up consideration of these issues. Satisfactory inventory of private rangelands was recognized as being dependent upon a sound methods technology.

The Symposium expressed urgency in getting uniformity of data among the agencies responsible for its collection, and revealed its awareness of substantive efforts currently underway toward that end.

Other technical problems discussed included the increasingly important need to have available sound methods for measuring resource interactions and tradeoffs. As competition increases for the many resources of the range, knowing how to predict the effects of multi-resource management systems upon each of the components of the ecosystem will become increasingly important--so that good decisions can be made about how to program management to achieve specific goals. This point came through loud and clear.

From that expression came a conclusion that the range community wants to do a better job of providing information; it is ready to assist toward that goal; and now is the time to assure that on-going efforts to provide better range information continue with vigor. Meanwhile, Society cannot afford to wait for answers about rangeland productivity and other matters until the perfect set of methods is developed and which provide the ultimate information. Range managers

must move ahead using the information now at hand or that which is being collected under existing procedures. To do less in this time of rapidly increasing need for resources from rangeland is to prevent these lands from contributing as they can to the flow of America's resource stream.

ECONOMICS OF RANGELAND

"Conservation doesn't cost. It pays!" Thus, did one Symposium speaker close his prepared remarks. But to let "conservation pay," the range operator must have the where-withall to invest. The rancher may have the incentive, the desire to practice conservation, but unless he has the funds to pay for conservation and development, he (and the country, as well), cannot enjoy its benefits. And herein lies a problem surfaced during the Symposium.

Many ranchers are carrying a heavy burden of debt and have experienced the impact of a serious cost-price squeeze since 1973. Unfavorable prices have resulted in negative returns on many ranches. Thus, ranchers have not had enough income to repay loans and to invest in range improvements. Improved profitability of rangeland-based livestock production enterprises is a pressing need.

Along with the need for improved rancher profitability is a need to discover the biological tradeoffs associated with livestock use of rangeland and to apply economic analyses so that the better, more cost-effective conservation and other practices can be applied. Widespread application of practices on a cost-effective basis could lead to more responsive and favorable public consideration of budget requests for range and associated conservation programs.

It became apparent that one sense of the Symposium was for increased emphasis on existing Federal programs and that these should be of economic value to the range-based livestock community. A higher profile to technical assistance and increased emphasis on Federal range education programs should encourage the rancher to implement range practices designed to result in better use of his rangeland and with less cost. Cost-sharing of conservation practices also seemed a reasonable approach to Symposium participants for encouraging good land and resource management. In addition, improved, low-cost sources of annual operating and long-term loans appeared to be essential if range livestock producers are to stay in business.

Some were of the opinion that corporate purchase of small range holdings was adverse to the traditional role that the small, family-type ranch has played in American agriculture. Others were concerned that urbanization and taking of rangeland for cropland would restrict future opportunities for rangelands to contribute as fully and effectively as they should toward production of needed livestock and other products.

RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

Many of the Nation's rangeland problems are rooted in administrative aspects. These have been discussed at some length earlier in this report. Other rangeland problems spring from under-utilization of existing technology. Symptoms of this weakness also have been presented. However, one of the means for further resolution of today's, and tomorrow's, rangeland problems is a well-tuned program of range research.

Some noted a decline in research directed specifically at improving rangeland for forage production. Proponents of this did not discount the continuing need for study of the interrelationships among range ecosystem components. They did suggest that in the zeal to learn more about how ecosystems function, less attention is being given to efficient production of forage.

The Symposium surfaced a research need for better methods of inventorying rangeland. Better understanding of the biology of rangeland ecosystems is another area of needed research. Some of the concepts basic to range management and determining its "condition" may need to be challenged through range research approaches. In addition, considerable interest was indicated in the need for methodology to measure resource interactions and tradeoffs in conjunction with multi-resource management programs.

More range or resource economics research is needed. How to identify and then evaluate all outputs from rangeland programs was an implied need.

Intensification of technology transfer should assist materially in solving many of the problems surfaced at the Symposium. However, research into the process of technology transfer, itself, while not an apparent point of the Symposium, seems implied. If, as the Symposium indicated, much technology is available that has not been applied, and if researchers and others have not succeeded in getting their research put into practice through demonstrations, pamphlets, field days, etc., then, perhaps the transfer process needs improvement.

Structuring of research programs received some attention. Of particular concern was a need to determine how to obtain State and local input into identifying research needs.